

**Remarks by Alexandra Hiniker, Lao PDR Project Manager, Cluster Munition Coalition
7 June 2010, Santiago, Chile**

Thank you, Chairperson.

Good afternoon, excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen. My name is Alex Hiniker, and together with Ms. Vilayphone Chouramany, we represent the CMC in Laos.

Our work in Laos is part of the CMC's global campaign to achieve three main objectives at the First Meeting of States Parties.

-The first one is to have wide participation from States as well as civil society.

-The second objective is to ensure that the meeting results in a comprehensive and coordinated action plan, a strong political declaration, and a clear program and structure for future diplomatic work on the Convention.

-The third overarching objective is to raise general awareness of the Convention, including both the suffering caused by cluster munitions and the hope to end it with a sustained commitment to the global ban on cluster munitions.

In Laos, the CMC works closely with the government, international organizations, foreign embassies, and UNDP to facilitate civil society participation in the lead-up to and implementation of the First Meeting of States Parties. In fact, this includes everyone sitting up here today.

We have identified hotels for several hundred civil society delegates to sleep in Vientiane this November, but our work doesn't stop there. We are going to make sure there's media coverage, great exhibitions and side events, catchy materials and good statements in the conference.

Since I arrived in Laos a little over a month ago, my days have been filled with meetings that spill over into evenings, weekends, and holidays, over lunches, dinners, Lao coffee, or BeerLao. People are full of ideas and eager to put in the time and energy to make them happen. We've come up with a great plan to build momentum from now until November involving everyone from monks to grandmothers.

As I've been caught up in all of these meetings, I haven't had much time to work on my Lao language skills, so I'm not quite fluent yet. But, there is one word I know that everyone seems to understand, and that's bombie. Bombie is the word used in Laos for cluster bombs. As you all know, Laos is the most affected country in the world.

Throughout the Oslo process, you've heard from people who experience firsthand the devastation of cluster munitions – and at the First Meeting of States Parties, you'll have an opportunity to see what they've been talking about.

But it's not all sad news. When you come to Laos this November, you'll also see the great work that's being done to end the suffering caused by these weapons. We have some fabulous ideas in store for the meeting. Everyone wants to pitch in, whether its dance performances including people with disabilities, clearance demonstrations, or massages from the blind. And of course there's the CMC evening reception, where you can cheer on players at the demonstration wheelchair basketball game.

One of the first thing people ask me when I meet them in Vientiane is, "What are you doing here?" When I say that I work on the big cluster bomb meeting in November, they all know exactly what I'm talking about. "Ah, yes, the big meeting this November," they say. And they wish me luck.

But I don't think the success of this meeting depends on luck. As you've just heard, the groundwork is being laid for a well-organized conference this November – and the CMC is actively engaged in this process.

In addition to weekly planning meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNDP, and the National Regulatory Authority, we communicate informally on a daily basis.

In fact, one of the reasons I'm most confident that this meeting will be great is the strong spirit of collaboration in Laos. Although we all have distinct roles, we do share one common objective, which is to make the First Meeting of States Parties a success.

Everyone is excited to welcome delegates from around this world to show them the great work being undertaken to mitigate the effects of these horrible weapons. We look forward to seeing you all in Laos this November. The work starts here – but we're going to have a little fun, too.

Bounmy

1. My name is Bounmy. My name means someone with a lot of luck. But I'm a cluster munition survivor from Lao PDR. One morning in 1996, I was digging my rice field. Suddenly, a cluster sub-munition exploded. Villagers heard the explosion and they came to see me and bring me home. When my parents saw me, they were devastated and thought that I was dead. At this moment, I became conscious and felt extreme pain and I cried out. Only then did my parents and relatives realize that I was still alive. They transported me to the hospital. It took about two hours to get there.

2. I spent 45 days in the hospital. My body was covered by bomb scrap. The doctor did not have any choice but to cut off my arm. When I returned home, I felt hopeless. I faced so many difficulties. I felt depressed and I wanted to kill myself. I was not able to work or help my family. My friends had deserted me.

3. Throughout this time, I was encouraged by my family, who also took care of me. Thanks to their support, I decided to finish my studies, and to pursue vocational training. Now I have a motivating job. But I know that many cluster munition survivors cannot find work.

4. I hope you understand how difficult living with disabilities can be. I hope you also understand that long after the war has ended, cluster bombs continue to kill innocent people and destroy homes. Whatever we do, we run into cluster munitions. We know that hundreds of survivors have been treated, but we also know that many more have died or are unknown to us. Large areas of fertile land remain contaminated. Our people cannot cultivate or make a living safely, and our country cannot develop.

5. Now I am a Ban Advocate. As you know, the Ban Advocates are a group of cluster munition survivors from around the world lobbying for the promotion of this Convention. In preparation for the First Meeting of States Parties in Vientiane, eight Lao cluster munition survivors joined the Ban Advocate team. Together we are raising awareness of the needs of survivors in our villages, provinces, and at the national and international level.

6. This Convention can change our lives. It is in your hands. We, survivors and our families, expect from you a clear and strong commitment to support not only the Lao survivors but affected communities all over the world. This will only be possible with a clear Vientiane Action Plan. We, as survivors, need to be involved. We know what the real needs of the victims are. Support has to be based on our needs. Concrete assistance is urgently needed now, and for many years to come.

7. We welcome you all to the meeting in Vientiane, and look forward to working with you. Then, the Convention will be a success and will bring real change to the lives of survivors.